STATE OF CALIFORNIA PETE WILSON, *Governor*

DELTA PROTECTION COMMISSION
14219 RIVER ROAD
P.O. BOX 530
WALNUT GROVE, CA 95690
PHONE: (916) 776-2290
FAX: (916) 776-2293

July 14, 1995

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: Commission Designation of Chairman and Executive Director to Comment on Proposed Projects (For Commission Consideration and Possible Adoption)

Background:

From time to time, the Commission receives requests for support of proposed projects and/or programs. Some of these proposals are for large or controversial projects; some are for small or non-controversial projects.

An example of a large or controversial project is the proposed restoration of Prospect Island to wetlands. The project would cover over 1,000 acres and would permanently retire agricultural lands in order to create aquatic and wetland habitat.

An example of a small or non-controversial project is the proposal for a 5 mph zone adjacent to the gas dock at the Willow Berm Marina, or proposal to translocate Trumpeter Swans to historic wintering areas in the Delta.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director, with the concurrence of the Chairman, to comment on small or non-controversial projects on behalf of the Commission.

Attached is a draft letter which would be similar to those sent by the Executive Director with the concurrence of the Chairman.

Staff recommends that large or controversial projects continue to be forwarded to the full Commission for consideration.

Attachment

DRAFT

On behalf of the Delta Protection Commission, I am writing to support the proposal of M&T Staten Ranch to translocate Trumpeter Swans to historic wintering areas in California. M&T Staten Ranch has acquired a national reputation for its pioneering work in providing seasonal habitat on commercial agricultural lands.

The current proposal includes trapping, banding, and inoculating approximately 50 to 75 cygnets and yearlings; transporting the young Trumpeter Swans to M&T Staten Ranch in San Joaquin County; seasonal flooding of harvested agricultural fields to provide habitat; and monitoring of the Swan population. M&T Staten Ranch is located in the Primary Zone of the Delta.

The Delta Protection Commission (Commission) is a State agency charged with developing a regional land use for the 500,000 acre Primary Zone of the Delta which includes portions of five counties.

The proposed project to provide seasonal habitat on agricultural lands is consistent with several policies and recommendations adopted as part of the Commission's Land Use and Resource Management Plan for the Primary Zone of the Delta (adopted February 23, 1995) including:

> Environment Recommendation 6: Management of suitable agricultural lands to maximize habitat values for migratory birds and other wildlife should be encouraged...
>
> Land Use Recommendation 3: Multiple use of agricultural lands for commercial agriculture, wildlife habitat, and If appropriate, recreational use, should be supported, and funding to offset management costs pursued from all possible sources...
>
> Agriculture Policy 8: Encourage management of agricultural lands which maximize wildlife habitat seasonally and year-round, through techniques such as sequential flooding in fall and winter, leaving crop residue, creation of mosaic of small grains and flooded areas, controlling predators, controlling poaching, controlling public access, and others.

With enthusiasm and respect for past achievements in this field by the managers of M&T Staten Ranch, and on behalf of the Delta Protection Commission, I wholeheartedly support the current proposal.

Sincerely,

Margit Aramburu
Executive Director

cc: Chairman Patrick McCarty
Supervisor Ed Simas

JUN 2 2 1995 DRAFT

Proposal to translocate Trumpeter Swans to historic wintering areas in California.

Background and Need

The major problem facing the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of trumpeter swans (Cygnus buccinator) is its vulnerability to winter mortality resulting from its greatly diminished migrations and winter distribution. By 1900, over 125 years of commercial harvest for the swan-skin trade, subsistence and market hunting had reduced the species to near extinction. By the 1930's, trumpeters in Canada and the lower 48 states were reduced to less than 200 which wintered near remote warm springs in the wilderness of the Tri-state region of Idaho, Wyoming and Montana where human-caused mortality was minimal. About half of this tiny remnant were year-round residents, the remainder migrated north each spring to nesting areas in Canada. Virtually all other trumpeters, which once migrated further south to the Gulf Coast, California and other scattered sites were extirpated by the early 1900's (Banko 1960, Gale et al. 1987).

During the past 20 years, the remnant Canadian flocks have increased from less than 200 to over 2,300, but essential migrations to suitable wintering sites have not yet been restored. Long-lived and highly traditional, adults lead their cygnets to the same sites each winter; pioneering of new wintering areas is minimal. Artificial winter feeding and protection from disturbance in the Tri-state area, combined with high mortality of the few swans that have attempted to pioneer further south, has resulted in increasing concentrations of trumpeters at marginal wintering sites in the Tri-state area. Both Canadian and Tri-state resident swans face a high risk of habitat degradation and are expected to experience high mortality when a severe winter strikes the region.

Since 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has led efforts developed and approved by the Pacific Flyway Council to rebuild a more secure distribution and reduce the population's vulnerability (Pacific Flyway Study Comm. 1992). Accomplishments include: 1) termination of artificial feeding at Red Rock Lakes NWR (RRLNWR), 2) development of winter capture techniques, 3) transplanting of 1,217 swans to sites in Idaho (578), Oregon (471), Wyoming (119) and Utah (49), 4) reduction of wintering concentrations of swans at RRLNWR and Harriman State Park (HSP), 5) improvement of aquatic vegetation at HSP, 6) shifting of swan winter use 50-75 miles further south in eastern Idaho, and 7) creation of new wintering sites at Fort Hall, Idaho, and Salt River, Wyoming. Translocations to Grays Lake NWR, Idaho, and Summer Lake, Oregon, show good potential to create new breeding flocks (Shea 1995).

Despite this progress, increasing numbers of Canadian migrants are arriving and attempting to winter in the Tri-state region where high mortality is inevitable. This problem will not be solved until the current bottleneck is opened and the majority of the migrants that arrive in the Tri-state area continue further south to historic

wintering areas (Shea 1995).

Prior to their extirpation, migrant trumpeters regularly wintered with tundra swans (C. columbianus) in California (Baird et al. 1884, Forbush 1912, Hornaday 1914, Banko 1960). Newberry (1857) reported both trumpeter and tundra swans in California, although they were less common than at the mouth of the Columbia River. Dr. Cooper (apparently in the 1850's) reported that "this bird [tundra swan] appears to be less common in California than the buccinator" (Baird 1884). Evermann (1886) reported that trumpeter swans were a more common winter visitant than tundra swans near Ventura, California.

In 1928, California Fish and Game wrote "One variety of swan, the whistling swan, visits the marshy areas of the state in considerable numbers each winter. Total protection given this species has resulted in a noticeable increase in numbers. The trumpeter swan, once common, is now one of the extinct species of game birds in California (Libby and Bryant 1928). Grinnell and Miller (1944) give its status in California as "Believed to have been of regular winter occurrence, formerly, though in smaller numbers than Whistling Swan, south through interior of State. Reported but once since 1900."

Although the historic migrations to California were virtually eliminated by the late 1800's, a few Trumpeters have been detected in California during the 20th century. Marked Trumpeters from the RMP (NWT flock) were first observed in northern California in 1986. In recent years, searches of the Sacramento delta and valley have located 20+ each winter. Trumpeters, like tundra swans, have demonstrated the ability to adapt to feeding on flooded crop residues. If migrations to California can be restored, winter habitat options for the RMP would be greatly increased (Drewien 1995, Shea 1995).

Opportunity

The success of previous translocations in 1990-95 has been hampered by the lack of suitable release sites that provide both adequate food and security from human disturbance while the birds are exploring their new habitat. Although Trumpeters can habituate to fairly high levels of human activity at wintering sites, when initially released in a strange environment they are much less tolerant and easily displaced.

The M&T Staten Ranch, located in the core swan winter habitat of the Sacramento River delta, has offered the use of their property as a release site for Trumpeter Swans in fall 1995. This 9,200 acre ranch occupies Staten Island and is intensively farmed for corn, wheat and tomatoes. Manager Jim Shanks has developed innovative management techniques to merge commercial farming with the deliberate creation of vast winter food supplies for a multitude of waterfowl, cranes and other wildlife species.

By sequentially flooding approximately 6,000 acres of harvested cropland, the M&T creates habitat for waterfowl and cranes from mid-September to mid-March. For the ±20,000 tundra swans that winter in the

Sacramento Delta, the M&T provides premier habitat; ±5,000 swans can typically be found on the Ranch, over 15,000 have been recorded. A pair of Trumpeters was detected among the Tundras during December 1994.

The M&T offers the best release site that we have so far been able to find in the flyway. Because the entire island is privately owned, access is strictly controlled. Hunting is minimal; there are no known or suspected lead-shot problems. Powerlines, which elsewhere are a major source of mortality, are minimal.

The M&T is enthusiastic about helping to augment Trumpeter Swan migration to their historic wintering area in California. The M&T has offered to help transport the swans by horse-trailer from Harriman State Park. The Ranch's Environmental Coordinator, Sally Shanks, has offered to conduct most of the monitoring on Staten Island and other nearby islands.

The Shanks have offered to manage in the best interest of the Trumpeters and adapt to their needs if necessary, although no particular need for adaptation is foreseen, other than to initially minimize human disturbance. As in previous years, if any problem with avian cholera is detected, the Ranch can quickly manipulate water to minimize disease conditions. Furthermore, translocated trumpeters can be vaccinated against avian cholera.

Proposed Action

During the 1995 trapping period in mid-late November, approximately 50-75 cygnets and yearlings would be captured by night-lighting at Harriman State Park, neck-banded and conspicuously color-dyed. Swans would be placed in wooden boxes and transported to the M&T by pickup and horsetrailer.

To eliminate risk from avian cholera during the first winter when the translocated birds will likely be somewhat stressed, a killed *Pasteurella multocida* vaccine will be administered prior to transport. This vaccine has been used successfully on geese, cranes, and ducks and provides immunity for at least 12 months. Dr. Jesse Price, National Wildlife Health Research Center, will provide the vaccine.

Monitoring on Staten and nearby islands will be conducted by Sally Shanks. A monitoring network, including California Fish and Game, USFWS, Ducks Unlimited, and California Waterfowl Association will monitor the movements and behavior of the translocated birds.

LITERATURE CITED

Baird, S. F., T. M. Brewer, R. Ridgway. 1884. The water birds of North America. Vol. I. Little, Brown, and Co. Boston. 537 pp.

Banko, W. E. 1960. The trumpeter swan. N. Am. Fauna 63, U.S.

Fish and Wildl. Serv., Washington, D.C. 214 pp.

Drewien, R. C. 1995. Trumpeter Swans in California, Utah and Nevada. Proc. of the 15th Trumpeter Swan Society Conf. In press.

Evermann, E. W. 1886. A list of birds observed in Ventura County, California. Auk (3):86-94.

Forbush, E. H. 1912. Game Birds, wild-fowl and shore birds of Massachusetts and adjacent states. Mass. State Board of Agriculture. Boston. 622 pp.

Gale, R. S., E. O. Garton and I. J. Ball. 1987. The history, ecology and management of the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans. U. S. Fish and Wildl. Serv. Montana Coop. Wildl. Res. Unit, Missoula. Unpub. rept. 314 pp.

Grinnell, J. and A. H. Miller. 1944. Pacific Coast Avifauna 27:65-66.

Hornaday, W. T. 1914. The American Natural History. Vol. III, Birds. Chas. Scribner and Sons. New York.

Libby, G. L. and H. L. Bryant. 1928. Bird study for California schools. State of California Div. of Fish and Game. Teachers Bulletin No. 9. Cal. State Printing Office, Sacramento. 80 pp.

Newberry, J. S. 1857. Report upon the Birds. in Chap. 2, pp. 73-110 + plates. Report upon the zoology of the route. Vol. 6. Reports of explorations and surveys to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, 1854-56. A. O. P. Nicholson printer, Washington.

Shea, R. E. 1994. Status of the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans, June 1993-May 1994. U. S. Fish and Wildl. Serv., Southeast Idaho Refuge Complex, Pocatello, ID. Unpub. rept. 30 pp.+appendices.

Shea, R. E. 1995. Monitoring of the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans, October 1994-March 1995. U. S. Fish and Wildl. Serv., Southeast Idaho Refuge Complex, Pocatello, ID. Unpub. rept. 15 pp.+appendices.

Subcommittee on Rocky Mountain Trumpeter Swans. 1992. Pacific Flyway management plan for the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans. Pacific Flyway Study Comm. [c/o USFWS, MBMO] Portland, OR. Unpubl. rept. 27 pp. + appendices.